

#HannibalEverAfter 2017 Ficlets Collection

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/9579122) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/9579122>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham , Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham's Dogs
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Fairy Tale , Fairy Tale Retellings , Fairy Tale Elements , Little Red Riding Hood AU , Alternate Universe - Snow White Fusion
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of Hannigram Ficlet Collections
Collections:	#HannibalEverAfter
Stats:	Published: 2017-02-03 Updated: 2017-11-23 Words: 17,965 Chapters: 5/29

#HannibalEverAfter 2017 Ficlets Collection

by [TheSilverQueen](#)

Summary

A collection of all the ficlets for #HannibalEverAfter 2017, the prompt calendar for which can be found [HERE](#). Summary will change to reflect the most current day, and warnings will be chapter-specific at the beginning of each.

Day 3: Cinderella - A Hannigram Cinderella retelling where neither Hannibal nor Will is the prince or Cinderella, and Will is own damn fairy godfather.

Day 4: Sleeping Beauty - It's not like Will *chose* to slay the dragon, okay?

Day 5: The Little Mermaid - Will is eleven the first time he sees the merman.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Little Red Riding Hood

Chapter Summary

"Good morning," says the wolf god. "I am come for the child you promised me."

Chapter Notes

Yes, I am indeed shamelessly entering my own event. Bite me. I have a Cinderella AU, Beauty & The Beast AU, and Diamonds and Toads AU that I need desperately to shed. This event is meant to unburden me. Mostly.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Theodore Graham only vaguely remembers the drunken rage that overtook him last night when Will wouldn't stop crying, but it all comes flooding back to him when he opens the door and finds a giant wolf with fur the color of night and eyes the color of apples.

I wish the damn wolf god would just eat you already!

So Theodore does the natural thing, and slams the door shut in the wolf's face.

Or, rather, he tries to.

Instead, the wolf cocks its head and rears up on its hind legs, and quite suddenly it's not a wolf at all but a man with furs draped all over his body, broad-shouldered and tall enough that Theodore has to crane his head back to see his face and strong enough that despite all of Theodore's strength, he cannot shut the door again.

"Good morning," the wolf god says. His voice is deep and accented, and for all its politeness, Theodore can hear the wolf spirit in it still. "I have come for the boy you wished away."

Theodore laughs. "Uh – I was just, uh – you know, just a little – annoyed," he says hastily. "I swear, normally he's a good boy, he was just a little loud, but I swear, he's the best thing that's ever happened to us, please just, uh, ignore that?"

"Why."

"I was just, you know, long day and all."

The wolf god hums. "Once upon a time, Theodore Graham, you came into my forest every day seeking the best wood to sell at market and shower your family with good food and gifts.

Now I do not even see you once a fortnight, and your home reeks of spirits and rumbles of hungry bellies.” The wolf pauses, and this time, when it speaks, it sounds less amused and much, much darker. “You wished for a child to go away, and so here I am, for the boy you wished away.”

“Please – Please I’ll give you anything you want – my wife will kill me – ”

“Even now,” the wolf interrupts, “you think more of your wife than your own responsibility for the child. Give William Graham to me.”

Or else says the way the wolf licks his sharp teeth, and Theodore shivers despite himself.

“One day,” he begs. “One day, please, even a half a day, just – just give me some time, please, I beg of you.”

The wolf god heaves a long sigh. The furs around its waist stir, ever so slightly, as if by a breeze, but then Theodore Graham sees the tip of an enormous black tail as it flicks from side to side, and he swallows, because even if human form, he cannot forget that this is a god. The wolf god shares nothing with a human, especially their sentimentality or concern over time; surely the wolf god thinks his request foolish.

“One day,” the wolf god says eventually. “One day, and then you will give me the child that is mine.”

And then the wolf god shakes himself, lowering his body as if to curve over Theodore and tear out his throat, but then Theodore realizes that he is merely crouching to land on all fours like the animal he is as the furs swallow him and the massive black wolf emerges, eyes burning like fire and tongue lolling out one side.

One day.

Theodore half convinces himself it was all a dream. His wife is less convinced, and leaves for market for a small red blanket that she wraps around their Will despite her husband’s derisive laughter.

The next day, the wolf returns to find a pale-faced Theodore.

“Where is my Will?”

“My wife – she just – she took my son – I – I couldn’t stop her, she just – ”

The wolf god closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, so deep that the long fur at his chest nearly brushes the floor. He licks his chops and blinks eyes of fire. “Do not lie to me, Theodore Graham. The house smells of your lies and your son. I will get what I came for.”

Then the wolf god brushes past, leaving Theodore whimpering and stammering on the floor. Carefully he pushes open each door and takes an inhale, each deeper than the last, until finally he arrives in the small kitchen. The window is open and the wind is blowing; the air here smells of flowers and spices and meats, but most of all child and milk and sweetness.

The wolf turns to the corner, and there is his prize, swaddled from head to toe in a blanket of the deepest red, as if it had been dyed with blood.

The wolf god laughs, despite himself, even as he blurs into human form and scoops up the child. “Foolish human,” he says to himself. “If anything, red calls to a wolf more than any other color. And the more is the pity, my Little Red; the color suits you, but not the atrocious smell. I shall have to remedy that.”

“Not with my Will.”

The wolf god turns to find the wife standing at the door. He smiles, for she has exhausted her arsenal – the kitchen and the window’s breeze cannot disguise her child’s scent; her husband’s lies cannot hide her child’s presence; and her red blanket cannot shield her child’s soul.

“And what can you do to stop me?”

The wife answers with an arrow fired straight into his chest, one of silver and holy water. The red blanket had merely been its guardian.

The wolf god roars, and the wife and the husband and the baby flee, never to return.

“I will find you, Little Red,” swears the wolf god.

Sixteen years later

“Will! Stop daydreaming and get inside!”

Will, who had been attempting to get an apple off the tree at the edge of their little garden in the back, scowls and withdraws. He hates the fact that he can’t go more than five feet outside the door without one of his parents screaming in their very shrill voices that he must come back inside. He’s been inside literally his entire life, trapped in never ending chores with books that he has read and reread a thousand times. He’s not even allowed to make the five minute walk to the barn to gather eggs or milk.

Still, long-taught obedience sends his feet wandering back to his father, even as his mind dreams of that shiny red apple.

“Not the apples again,” his father says in exasperation.

Will just shrugs. He can’t help it. He’s fascinated by the color red in all its variants, but he learned the hard way that anything he shows interest in is quickly banned from the house in all its forms. Even the old moral stories his mother had been so fond of are no exception; Will had once adored the story of the Boy Who Cried Wolf, and into the fire it had gone the second Will’s father found it.

His father, though, is long used to Will’s silence. Instead he just sends Will back to the attic, where piles and piles of more books await for Will to copy them, letter by painstaking letter,

for the local priests and nobility. It's their sole source of income, really, as their family almost never leaves the house.

His newest commission is from some count of a ridiculously long title. Count Something Something the Eighth, from a far away country.

Will likes him, though. He paid such a handsome amount of money up front that his father could not object to the fact that the count had wanted the book transcribed in ink as red as the apples Will has wanted all his life, and Will finds great joy in dipping his quill in the red ink to write and write and write the hours away. It's a pity that the book isn't that long; Will is almost finished.

In fact, it's only another hour before Will, regretfully and lovingly, traces the last letter and goes to sleep, where he dreams of red threads and red ink and red eyes, laughing in the darkness.

Count Something Something the Eighth makes the unusual decision to come and personally retrieve his books once Will sends word that they are done. It makes his father fuss, but Will shrugs. More projects would not be unwelcome, if they brought more red ink, so he merely accepts the invitation and readies the books.

The Count who appears at Will's doorstep is tall and handsome, with sleek graying hair and shark cheekbones and a strange accent, but none of that calls to Will as much as the blood red cloth that peeks out of his suit pocket.

"You have a . . . fascination with red," the Count notes, flipping through the pages with a content smile.

Will blushes and averts his eyes. It's not his fault, but also not something he really wants to explain to a complete stranger. "The red ink was beautiful," he says instead. "It was of the finest quality. I can't thank you enough for the opportunity."

"Your talent is more than equal to the quality of the ink," the Count replies. "I am gratified to have met you. Your reputation is most certainly deserved."

"Thank you."

"If I may," the Count says, and then hesitates. "It is . . . unorthodox, perhaps. But if you would do me the great honor . . ."

And then, to Will's shock, the Count reaches into the depths of his cloak and pulls out a parchment package, twined in maroon thread with a beautiful scarlet bow on top. In what Will presumes is the Count's writing is his name, careful and precise, and almost so gorgeous Will is afraid to rip the packaging.

"Your writing is beautiful," Will says before he can stop himself. "Why – "

“Why did I hire a scribe?” When Will nods hesitantly, the Count answers, “These books are from the depths of my family’s archives. They mean a great deal to me. I did not trust myself to copy them on my own, if you can believe that. I searched for a very long time for someone who would love books as much as me, and have the skill to pour that love into their preservation. I am very happy to have found you.

“Now, please,” the Count says, “enjoy my gift. I shall contact you shortly with another commission.”

“Of course, my lord.”

“A bit of advice, though, if you are willing to take it.”

“Yes?”

The Count places one long finger on the top of the package, and Will shivers from the heat that radiates from the Count’s body, so close to his own. He’s never been so close to a stranger before.

“Open it by yourself, will you? As a favor to me. I wouldn’t want it go to waste by someone who could not . . . appreciate its beauty.”

The gift is beyond Will’s wildest dreams. A riding cloak, which in and of itself is beyond generous; when Will goes riding he wears the same coat he always does, as they cannot afford such frivolities as multiple cloaks. But oh, the color! It is so deep and so richly red Will might have thought a body had been bled to give it such a gorgeous and vivid color. And so soft, as though it had been spun from clouds and the best silk in the land.

With one touch, Will falls hopelessly in love, and he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that he cannot don the cloak in the house, but he also cannot wait to wear the cloak, to see the red against his skin and feel the softness against his cheeks.

So, for the first time, when his father nods off in front of the fire, wine bottles scattered amongst the floor, Will creeps through the kitchen and trots down the path until he reaches the edge of the fruit garden their neighbor keeps. It’s close enough that Will could claim a foolish nighttime craving for apples, but far away enough that Will would certainly hear his father coming and have time to hide his precious gift.

The cloak is even better once he sets it upon his shoulders. On his shoulders, it’s like pure joy against his skin.

He can’t resist the temptation to twirl, just a little bit, and his delight at how it flares out around his legs makes him twirl again and again and again, laughing despite himself, until suddenly his cloak is snagged and his movement is arrested, and when Will looks up to disentangle himself, disoriented, he finds himself nowhere near the fruit garden at all.

He’s in the forest, deep where his father once said he was never go, for fear of the wolves that gobbled up straying children.

The cloak, though, is caught fast, and Will scrabbles at with his fingers until finally the corner comes loose – but by then, it's too late.

He turns around and comes face to face with an enormous black wolf.

“He – Hello, Mr. Wolf,” Will manages to squeak out. “Please – please don't eat me. I just, I was just, dancing! Dancing is all.”

The wolf swishes his great tail, and his eyes blink, slowly and deeply, as if greatly amused. They are red like the hottest fire, and Will almost feels as entranced by them as he was by the cloak and the red ink.

Hello, Little Red, says the wolf politely, sitting down on its haunches.

“Er, my name is Will.”

I know. It has been a long time. I have missed you.

“What? I don't – ”

– remember me? I would not imagine you would. You were hardly a babe, after all. But you were mine, promised to me with a blood oath sworn under the full moon, and it does not do to break a promise to me.

Will swallows. He's heard stories of what happens to gods who snatch children from the cradle. It's the one kind of tale his father had wholeheartedly approved of. “Are you going to eat me?”

Eat you? No. Why would I do such a thing?

“It's all I've ever heard of.”

And where did you hear those stories, my Little Red? From the children who were freed, or from the humans who squandered their chances?

Which is a fair point, Will concedes. He has only ever heard one side's part of the story.

Although – freed. That's an interesting choice of words. And Will gets the sense that this creature, whoever or whatever he is, chooses each word as carefully as he does each step on the edge of a crumbling cliff, merely for the joy of watching how others stumble as they attempt to emulate him.

“Why freed?” Will asks.

The wolf snorts and gets back up, tail swishes and eyes gleaming. It pushes its snout against Will's hand before he can retract it, and his fur is so soft Will can't help but touch him again. It's even softer than the cloak, and warm, so warm, as if the fire that burns beneath the wolf's skin peers out beneath his eyes.

Come, my Little Red, the wolf coaxes, nudging at his cheek and sniffing at his hair. He's so big that from feet to shoulders that Will has no doubt he's some sort of god; no normal wolf is so large. We have a great deal of missed time to make up for.

“What about my father?”

As I said. A blood oath, sworn under a full moon. You were mine longer than you were ever his.

“I – Can I . . . ”

Lesson one, Little Red. You may ask any question you wish.

“Can I keep my cloak?”

It's such a silly request – Will knows he should be asking where the wolf intends to take him, what will happen next, what this wolf really is. But it spills out of his mouth, and the wolf seems to take no offense at all.

It was a gift. I am not in the habit of receiving gifts I have bestowed. What use have I for a cloak?

And while Will stares, mouth aghast, the wolf shakes himself carefully and starts trotting away, tongue lolling playfully from his mouth.

Besides, the wolf continues, red is most certainly your color, not mine.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 2's prompt is "Snow White". Erm I have some half-naked sweaty Mads coming up?

Also, yes, I did indeed borrow/mangle a quote from Star Trek Beyond. And probably also something else that I've now forgotten. Cookies to whoever gets the reference.

Snow White

Chapter Summary

The neighbors, it turns out, were not joking. There actually is a sweaty half naked man standing in Will's yard having a very intense stare-off with one of Will's chickens.

Chapter Notes

So I drew a lot of inspiration from "Snow White & The Huntsman" and [this deleted scene with Mads](#). Please go watch it. I'll wait.

Now, we carry on.

Oh, also: warnings for attempted murder of a child. And spousal murder. And just like . . . all the creepy things that come with fathers that mysteriously die at the hands of evil queen stepmothers.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When his stepmother starts hallucinating about a talking mirror, Will takes that as a sign that it's time to make his dream of owning a cottage by a stream with lots of dogs into a reality. Like, a right now reality.

So, one night when he sees her descend the steps into the basement with the really creepy mirror that she'd insisted had been a gift from her father and had refused to let anyone else see, even after she married his father, Will quickly packs up a small bag of food and gold coins, hides his crown at the bottom of the closet so the servants assume he just went to town to get drunk, and then takes off into the night.

A few odd jobs gets him enough money to buy a small cottage on the edge of a stream, which no one wants because apparently there's a really scary huntsman that tends to prowl around the woods like he owns them and also he likes to pop out at people half-naked and sweaty and all scowly, so people are more than willing to part with the land and the cottage when Will says that he doesn't care and also offers up his knowledge of gardening and herbs and fishing in exchange for gossip and fresh bread and meats. It takes no time at all to renovate the cottage, and soon Will has a nice exchange business of fish and herbs for bread and meats.

He sees no sign of the huntsman though, which is good.

Will earns more goodwill through his work with animals. He's pretty good at reading other people, which is part of the reason his father says his stepmother always thought he was plotting against her, but he's even better at animals, and once he lets it be known that he's more than willing to take in the dogs other people have grown tired of, his pack of two becomes three and then four and then seven in no time at all.

Three months in, and Will hears not even the slightest whisper of the missing prince or his crazy stepmother, so he shrugs and starts sleeping soundly through the night.

That's when the huntsman decides to appear.

One particularly warm, sunny day, Will decides to make an apple pie. He already has the dough, and the apples only cost him a few fish, and he figures he's earned the dessert for surviving on his own and undetected for three whole months, especially considering that the one time he did venture the idea of abdicating his throne his father had laughed and said he would never be able to survive without servants to help him.

He's just in the process of rolling out the door and dodging his curious pack when suddenly Winston, who's the newest and therefore wariest of his entire pack, sits up suddenly and lets out a sharp, piercing bark.

Will looks up and nearly drops his rolling pin.

The neighbors, it turns out, were not joking. There actually is a sweaty half naked man standing in Will's yard having a very intense stare-off with one of Will's chickens.

Although Will does have to object to the scowly-face bit. To anyone else, perhaps, it would look like a scowl, but Will's empathy tells Will that this is more like . . . a stoic face. The man's sharp cheekbones and even sharper eyes make people uneasy, and it becomes simple for them to label the man as unfriendly rather than attempting to think about why. If anything, the man gives off more of curious air than an unfriendly one, rather like a new dog curious about his new surroundings.

"Um, hello, Huntsman," Will ventures, after about five minutes when the man and the chicken are still staring.

The Huntsman grunts, and the chicken gives one loud squawk and flounces off.

Okay then.

Then the Huntsman looks up, and Will swallows. Hard. Because damn if this man isn't one of the finest men Will's ever laid eyes on, and Will has seen a *lot* of men. Like, a lot a lot. But most of them were simpering, fawning idiots, more concerned with trying to outdo each other with their silly peacock tails than trying to do the actual reasonable thing and, you know. Talk to Will. Even bow to you. Even just nod politely from a distant. Human things.

This man, on the hand, looks like he would have made them all leave in an instant, gasping and offended, and that's the best thing Will could ever have hoped for.

The Huntsman inclines his head. He has a great big axe by his side, and long silver-brown hair that's gathered in a neat braid that twists down his neck. He doesn't even seem the least bit aware of how intimidating he looks, although he stops a reasonable distance away once Will's dogs start shuffling their feet.

He points to Will's well.

"You can't speak?"

The Huntsman blinks and points at the well again.

"Eh, fair enough," Will says. Will went through an experimental mute phase too, when he was younger and still working through the headaches his empathy would give him. "Sure, help yourself."

The Huntsman blinks again, looks at his great dirty hands, and then back up at Will.

"Oh! Cup!"

Will snags a cup from his rack of drying dishes and reaches out over the windowsill, and the Huntsman lays his axe neatly against the wall and comes over to take the cup. Up close, with his broad shoulders and chest dotted with patches of silver hair that match his head, he's even more stunning and Will dry-swallows again just from the closeness of him.

The Huntsman takes the cup, gulps down some water, pours more over his head, shakes his shoulders as if he's a dog shaking the droplets from his fur, and then neatly lays the cup back down and vanishes into the forest.

Will takes that as a sign to tidy up and retire early to allow for ample recreational time.

The next day, when he wakes up and stumbles out the door yawning, he nearly cracks his skull open over a pile of perfectly logs outside his door.

Their relationship continues on in this fashion for several weeks. The Huntsman appears, usually around noon when the sun is highest and the weather the warmest, and points to the well. Will gives him a cup and lets him drink, and then the next day the Huntsman leaves either more food for Will's fire or, on one memorable occasion, a whole dead deer, neatly butchered and with a bundle of soft furs.

Will, in return, molds another cup of clay, one much bigger and better able to quench the Huntsman's thirst, and when Will hands that one to him, the man almost cracks a real smile. Of course, it could have been because Will scrawled "Something Something's Cup" on the side.

Will isn't completely rude, though. He also starts handing over some of his bread and vegetables and fruit, because he figures a diet of meat, meat, and more meat can't be really that healthy, even it has given the Huntsman such an imposing and striking figure. Plus all

those muscles, but it's not like anyone else is around to judge Will for what he gets up to in his spare time under the blankets.

They never talk, but they grow more comfortable with each other. Soon Will isn't at all bothered as the Huntsman comes ever and ever closer with each visit, until one day he looks up to find the Huntsman right over his shoulder, breathing hot air on his skin as he watches Will carefully slice up his latest catch.

"It's a fish," Will says uselessly.

The Huntsman gives Will a look. He smells faintly of sweat and leaves, although not in an unpleasant way. Will chooses to blame this on the recent water the Huntsman poured over his head rather than the fact that maybe he's sniffing the Huntsman just a little too much.

"Don't look at me like that. It's like you're giving me something else to talk about."

The Huntsman leans down and clicks his fingers at Winston. A few whuffs and clicks later, and Winston rubs up against the Huntsman.

Then he looks at Will again.

"You want . . . me to talk about my dogs?" Will asks slowly.

The Huntsman leaves at sunset that day, loaded down with a small package of salted fish, bread, and apples, although when Will wakes up he finds more wood and a small bundle of soothing honey for the voice he talked into nothingness describing his dogs.

It makes Will smile.

His smile grows even wider when the Huntsman returns at noon with a tiny squirming puppy, his gestures almost meek as he gently places the puppy in Will's lap where Will had been kneeling to weed in his garden.

Before he can chicken out, Will leans up, catches that lovely thick braid in his fingers, and places a quick kiss on the Huntsman's cheek.

The Huntsman turns bright red, stumbles back a few steps, and vanishes quickly into the woods.

He leaves his axe behind, and that more than anything makes Will even giddier.

The Huntsman doesn't return the next day, and Will actually doesn't notice, too busy playing with his new puppy.

He does, however, notice when almost a full week passes, and the axe is still leaning up against Will's wall, and he hasn't received any more wood and his bundles are still untouched on his windowsill. So the puppy grows, and Will's worry grows, and still there is no sign of the Huntsman.

Until one morning Will wakes up and stumbles over something alive and very bloody on his doorstep.

It takes a long, struggling, intense bit of effort, but Will eventually gets the wounded, wheezing Huntsman into his bed. Thankfully, it turns out that there's blood that isn't his than there is that is his, mostly because once Will gets most of the blood off and turns his attention treating the actual wounds, he finds mostly non-life-threatening ones. There's no rhyme or reason to them, though, no pattern like an animal attack.

Will's empathy whispers as he cleans. A sword here, dagger there, boot to the chest there.

This had been no attack, no fight. This had been an ambush.

Once the Huntsman sleeps soundly again, his wounds cleaned and bandaged, Will brushes his long hair and covers him in warm blankets. He runs warm, normally, but today he's like a furnace, and in the three seconds Will turns around to put the bowl on the table, three of his dogs clamber up to laze against the Huntsman's side, so Will just sighs and is glad that the Huntsman isn't allergic.

Then he goes and lights the fire, and takes the opportunity to rummage through the Huntsman's things, looking for clues. He's hoping that it isn't his stepmother, but who knows, maybe the Huntsman has enemies of his own.

Rope, broken and snapped; the Huntsman was tied up, and tore through the ropes in anger, apparently. Daggers and broken swords; the Huntsman fought his bare hands, but that didn't stop him from turning his enemies' weapons against them. Most have dried blood and are chipped, because he didn't hold back.

And an apple, beautiful and perfectly polished, as though it had just been plucked from a tree.

Will admires it in the firelight, turning it over and over in his hands. It's not even bruised, and the Huntsman staggered all the way back to Will's house from heavens know where, and then Will not too gently dumped it in the house before he went back out to fetch the Huntsman inside, and yet it is still perfect.

He wonders what such a perfect apple would taste like. Perhaps he should make pie; the Huntsman seemed to like the last one. But really, Will tells himself, he should test the quality first before he feeds the Huntsman.

A thud and a low whine makes him turn just in time to see the Huntsman frantically gesturing at him.

"What? It's just an apple? See?" Will snaps off a perfect bite, chews and swallows. "It's fine."

The Huntsman leaps out of bed, face paler than Will's ever seen it, but it's too late; Will's world is already going dark, and even as his eyes close, he sees the oozing poison core of the apple he'd just foolishly eaten. The Huntsman hadn't brought Will food in apology for his

absence; he'd brought as proof that Will was in danger here, and Will had walked right into that trap himself.

Damn it, Will thinks, and then he knows no more.

Will comes awake sometime later, gasping for breath, but when he reaches up blindly, his fingers are greeted by a familiar braid of long hair, and familiar hands trace his face.

"Will."

Will's eyes fly open. "You can *talk*?!"

The Huntsman regards him with relief. For the first time since they've met, he's wearing proper clothes, but they're ill-fitting and bloody. The white shirt is clumsily buttoned and barely contains the breadth of his shoulders, which gives Will the nagging suspicion that it's stolen, an impression not at all helped by the fact that his pants are royal guard blue and stained with mud in the way no guard commander would tolerate.

The Huntsman clears his throat. "After the curse broke, yes. A witch stole my voice in retribution for my refusal to take her contract. You are even more charming than I remember."

"What?"

"When you were a child, do you remember the winter of six months?"

"Well, yeah."

Every child in Will's kingdom remembers that winter vividly. They'd thought winter would never end. Will's stepmother had been seemingly unbothered, swanning around in the same short-sleeved summer dresses, but everyone else had been bundled from head to toe. His father had never quite recovered from the cold he'd picked up that winter.

The Huntsman strokes his hair. "Your stepmother brought me in. She wanted to arrange . . . an accident. I had a reputation of taking any contract that paid me fairly, but this – I could not do this to you. You were unique and beautiful, and I refused. And she took my sanity and my voice."

"She hated me for that long?"

"She didn't hate you, my prince. She was jealous. Killing you was the only way she thought she could stop wasting so much time being jealous."

"I would gladly have left."

"I know." The Huntsman sighs. "When you came to town, I started remembering bits and pieces. Your dogs – you always loved puppies. I brought you one, when I first started to infiltrate your security. You didn't even give me a second glance, but you loved that pup and cared for it as your own. And your eyes, I could never have forgotten your eyes."

Will is too ashamed to admit that it's true; he never did remember who gave him that puppy. He does remember the dog, though, vividly. It's the one reason he was able to prove himself capable of taking care of another being, and then being considered more seriously for being a future king, something that forever angered his stepmother once she realized his father was serious about passing the throne to him and not her.

"When I learned that she was searching for you, I sought to pretend you had passed already and collect the reward, in the hopes she might finally be at peace. Instead, she was waiting for me. I tried to warn you, but . . ."

"But I ate the apple."

"Yes."

"So . . . what happened to her?"

The Huntsman shrugs. "She ran from me like a coward. She lost her footing in the dark and tumbled off the cliff. Since my voice has returned, I can only assume the best."

"Wow, you're morbid."

"She sought your death for no reason but her own pleasure. I would have gladly ripped her limb from limb."

"Yeah, I'd – I'd rather know your name."

"Hannibal," the Huntsman says, with a neat little bow. "Hannibal of House Lecter."

"Well, Hannibal of House Lecter," Will repeats with a smile, "since I was unconscious for our first kiss, I think you owe me one."

"What makes you think I kissed you?"

"I'm not an idiot. Only one thing breaks a curse that strong."

"I saved your life," Hannibal muses instead, eyes gleaming as he pretends to gaze into the distance, as if deep in thought. It's the worst lie he's ever seen from Hannibal. "I do believe you owe me."

"Oh, just shut up and kiss me."

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 3's prompt is Cinderella and I might be disappointing you, but, uh, it will involve a retelling where neither Hannibal nor Will are Cinderella. Or the Prince, actually. *hides*

Cinderella

Chapter Summary

A Hannigram Cinderella retelling where neither Hannibal nor Will is the prince or Cinderella. ♪(´▽`)ﾉ

Chapter Notes

Sooooooo THIS STORY. This story is the entire reason I made the #HannibalEverAfter calendar. This. All of this. Also apologies for how long it took.

Warnings: implied sexual abuse of a child (thanks Mason, you giant creeper) and also someone getting whipped repeatedly. I promise Mason gets comeuppance in the end

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Maybe this is a fairy tale and maybe it does have a happy ending, but Will would like to make one thing very clear: he does *not* believe in fairies. At all. Good fairies, bad fairies, but most of all fairy godmothers. And why should he? His father and his father's father and his father's father's father have all been servants, and each of them have worked hard for every single day of their life, and no magical flying being has ever popped out of the bushes to reward them with carriages made of pumpkins or casks of overflowing money or even good health and beauty. Whether a cruel master or a kind one doesn't matter; they work, they eat, they sleep, and they work some more, and one day when they die their child steps up in their place.

For normal people, at least, fairy godmothers are kind of like strong, right-blowing breezes during sailing. You hope for them, but when they don't come, you get out a paddle and start paddling.

Will's been paddling his whole life now. He's on a "cruel master" turn, even since the Lady of the house married Lord Verger, who had said he only wanted a "mother for his lovely children".

It's not exactly the most accurate sentence.

In any way.

First off, he doesn't allow the Lady to mother them. She's not even allowed to speak to them, because he knows what's best for them. Secondly, they're not lovely. Well, Margot mostly is.

but even she can get all wired up sometimes, and Cordell is the nastiest piece of work Will's ever had the fortune of accidentally upending a bucket of cold ashes on. And the Lord Verger definitely wanted the money and the reputation more than the children wanted a mother, since it's hardly two months in before he convinces her to go a honeymoon across the sea and comes back with her urn of ashes.

Still, it's not all bad. Lord Verger really doesn't understand how to run a household, so he cut the staff but didn't fire some people, which Will isn't entirely alone. And Margot can be quite sweet once she's around the horses.

But back to fairy godmothers.

See, about two years in after Lord Verger takes over the house, the Princess Alana throws a huge ball, inviting all eligible men and women of age to participate as she searches for a consort when she is queen. Lord Verger immediately starts buying racks and racks of clothing and hiring tutors to train up Cordell for what Verger wants his little puppet to be. Margot, though.

Margot gets locked in the attic.

So Will decides to do what he's always done: be his own damn paddle.

It's not hard to sneak out. Lord Verger is a late riser because he stays up so late partying and getting drunk as a skunk, so Will – after completing his morning tasks and scarfing down an early lunch – takes off to the main town with a basket pretending to be on an errand run. It's not hard; he's one of the few servants still allowed into town, so most people dismiss him the second they see him.

For the first time, though, Will heads straight for a little shop called *Mischa's*.

It's a tasteful little thing, with a bakery on one side and a library on the other. The name is in neat gold print, beautiful and adorned with lovely flowers, and the cloths and dresses and suits that are displayed in the window make Mischa's one of the most sought after tailors in town. Will is sure that she probably has a backlog three miles long after the ball's announcement, but still. He has to try.

Margot is a noblewoman, after all, and she's kind with a spine of steel aching to be uncovered. She doesn't deserve to end up forgotten and exiled to lonely spinsterhood in a nunnery, the way so many noble daughters are. And yes, maybe Princess Alana won't like her or Margot won't like Princess Alana, but a coming out on a stage like that will mean people will come calling, and as long as Margot gets a way out for a life of her choosing, that's enough for Will. She's the closest thing he has to a sister, after all, the one who sneaks him treats on the side and tells gossip between the hay bales.

“Can I help you, sir?”

Will jumps about a foot into the air out of shock, which makes him really glad that the basket is mostly empty.

“I, er, um, hi?” Will mumbles lamely.

It, at least, earns him a much more genuine grin from the speaker, a woman with dark hair and warm eyes. Everything about her screams *interesting*, but the clearly handmade dress to the little embroidered edges of her collar to the little flower tucked absently behind her ear.

“I, uh. I was wondering if I could order a dress for a friend.”

The woman cocks a hip against a shelf. “Someone you interested in wooing?” she asks teasingly, her eyes bright even as she laces her fingers together as if to give the picture of total serious consideration.

“What – um, no,” Will corrects hastily, because *ew*. He loves Margot, he really does, but, yeah, definitely as a sister more than anything else. If there’s anything to make someone less appealing, it’s when they order two baths in one day and Will ends up carrying twenty buckets of heavy, boiling water up two flights of stairs. “She’s kind of like . . . my sister.”

The woman softens, just a bit, but her excitement doesn’t fade the least bit. It’s like a river being split by a branch; it just flows around and finds a new path. “Still a gift for someone special, then, right? You have her measurements?”

Will wouldn’t know measurements if someone taped a tape measure to his eyes. Still, he’s not completely clueless.

Carefully, he pulls out one of Margot’s dresses from his basket. It’s simple, a flowing pattern of white curlicues on a black background, and she’s worn it recently so he knows it fits. It’s his best guess, and he knows she won’t miss it because Cordell broke her arm the last time she wore it so it currently has some pretty negative associations in her mind,

The woman clucks her tongue. “Smart one, you are. Pretty dress too. You sure she needs a new one?”

“I want her to have something new. And special. For once.”

The *for once* spills out against Will’s control, but something in the statement must ring true with the woman. She lowers the dress and stares at him, as though she could see through to the very of his soul, and Will, for a moment, wonders if this is how Cordell and Margot and Lord Verger and every other “normal” human feels like when Will turns his ability on them to discover their thoughts and emotions.

“What’s your boy?” the woman asks.

“Uh, Will.”

“Well, Will,” the woman says, “come with me.”

The woman, as it turns out, is called M – “Like the letter,” she had joked – and she’s a very fast worker once she accepts a mission. She fires off round after round of seemingly random questions that Will answers hesitantly, and then reemerges from the terrifying room of colors

with a vast assortment of the most gorgeous red cloth Will's ever seen, and he knows immediately that Margot will love it.

She keeps talking after that, even as she cuts and measures and sews, until finally it hits Will.

"I, uh. I don't really have the money to pay for all of this. At once, I mean," Will adds hastily. "I promise you'll get the money eventually."

"Eh, the conversation is almost worth it," M throws over her shoulder. "You wouldn't believe how many people just come in here and bark out orders at me and the staff. You, though, you're actually talking and paying attention and helping – yes, thank you for that, I did need those scissors next – and in general being a more decent human being than most."

"Well," Will says, "I figured it was easier than silence."

"Will, you have no idea."

"I still can't pay you up front though – "

M sighs and starts stitching an immensely tiny and delicate pattern on whatever patch she's bent over. Will would say it's a sleeve, but the last time M started stitching he thought it had been for the skirt and it turned out to be for a pattern of ruffles, so now he just doesn't try and guess anymore. "I see you won't less this one go," she mutters through a mouthful of pins. "So how about this: you come here and talk to me and help out in the shop a bit – the floor needs some sweeping, and the displays always need folding – and then I'll consider the payment in full."

"But – but these dresses – this name – it's worth far more than – "

"Payment is given for the services rendered. I render the service, so I decide the payment. Take it or leave it, Will."

Will walks out with a new dress and a healthy respect for needles.

Margot's face when Cordell and Lord Verger leave her behind is the worst face of all: resigned, faintly annoyed, exhausted. She's on the verge of giving up.

So Will pulls her aside, lays out the new dress, and outlines their plan.

"What – Will – where – "

"Your favorite horse is saddled and waiting in the second stable," Will interrupts, digging through Margot's shoes for her sturdiest pair of boots. "The palace isn't that far, and you're a good rider; you'll make it just before they start presenting to the princess. It's a masquerade, so here's a mask, here's your shoes, here's your dress, now get dressed because we don't have much time."

"Will."

“What? Margot. Margot, listen to me.” Will waits before she makes eye contact before he forges ahead; better to rip the bandage off quickly. “Margot, you’ve dreamed your whole life of getting away from this wretched place. Even if the princess doesn’t pick you, you’ll find something. Or someone. You’ll get out.”

“But why me? Why not you?”

“Well,” Will says with a little smile, “someone has to be the fairy godfather.”

“I thought it was a fairy godmother.”

“And now you have two less minutes, chop chop!”

He gets a pair of slippers flung at him, but in the end it doesn’t matter. Margot takes off with her beautiful red dress, her mother’s heirloom slippers in her pouch with the embroidered mask, and Will gives it about ten minutes before he gets dressed and follows after her.

The bad thing about balls is that it makes the staff desperate for extra help. When he offers, they ask him a few quick questions before they dress him in a uniform and send him off with a tray of little cheese bites and crackers. Will unloads that as soon as he can and then sneaks off to a the courtyard, where there’s a rather nice tall tree with a good view into the ballroom through one of the balconies. It takes Will no time at all to shimmy up it and then he watches, smiling at Margot’s entrance and the interested murmurs in her wake, and cackling even more at Cordell’s dumbfounded drooling.

The ball passes as all balls do. People eat and dance and eat and dance and talk, talk, talk. So much talking.

Margot never sits for more than five seconds before another suitor sweeps her off her feet, but sometimes they talk and dance, and Will knows Margot isn’t stupid; she’s got a good head on her shoulders and is excellent at figures, and he knows she’s forging connections for the future.

All she needed is one good push, and she has that now.

Besides, Will figures two or three twirls with the Princess herself isn’t that bad for the first night.

And then the tree vibrates, just ever so slightly like someone’s knocked on it as they would a door, and Will nearly drops all the cheese and crackers he stashed in a pocket when someone below says, “And what are you doing up there, little mongoose?”

“Uh – ”

Will does actually drop a piece of cheese when he realizes that the person standing below is one of the commanders of the royal guard, one eyebrow raised ever so slightly, clad in the sharp whites and blues of the guard with a handful of decorations at his breast to mark his rank. He’s even got a rather fancy and probably very sharp sword dangling from his waist,

and he makes a picture so perfect that the only thing out of place is one strand of hair that's escaped the loose ponytail of long hair at his back.

"Hi?" Will offers.

The eyebrow is joined by its twin. "I presume that you are not trying to commit life-threatening crimes against the royal family from there?"

"Uh, no?"

"Excellent. This is a terrible vantage point, anyways," he says matter-of-factly. "Will you come down? It must be cold."

"I probably should, uh, actually be going and –"

"And the first step to going home would be to climb down the tree."

When Will hesitates, he pointedly places one hand on the hilt of his sword, shifts his stance back, and says, "Please."

Will comes down the damn tree.

The man's name is Hannibal Lecter, Captain of the Princess Alana's private guard, and thankfully he seems more amused with Will than annoyed with or suspicious of him. He does do a full pat down – for security reasons, although he does laugh when he finds the stash of cheese – but after that he simply takes Will into a small room, kindles a fire, and then stares at him as though memorizing his face.

"What?" Will snaps eventually.

"Has anyone ever told you that you have a very expressive face?"

"Uh . . ."

The correct answer is no, but Cordell also beats him up every time he makes eye contact, so there's definitely an incentive to be blanked-face and stoic.

"Well, you do. It is very beautiful. Each thought traveling through your mind like a wind riffling through a sea of grass, no blade untouched, everything as natural and unstoppable as the sea beating against the sand."

"I thought you were a guard, not a poet."

"Everyone has their hobbies." Captain Lecter shifts, ever so slightly, and this time when he laces his fingers together he is serious, completely so, but not in a dangerous way. Well, not dangerous as in Will's going to die, more like serious as in Captain Lecter wants to pin him down, like a butterfly, and not let him leave. "I imagine yours involve avoiding eye contact, to try and prevent the bleed-through of others' minds into your own."

“Don’t,” Will grits out, suddenly furious. He didn’t ask for this – not for his crappy life or his crappy abilities or anything. “Don’t – Just don’t.”

Captain Lecter blinks, once, but Will can read him now – he’s not contrite at all, not really, merely curious. He wants to see where the lines are drawn in the sand, and he’s not too worried about the incoming tide, powerful though it may be.

“My apologies,” he says finally.

He doesn’t mean it, and suddenly Will wants to be anywhere but here. He’s given Margot her chance and she has two more and he has lots of chores to do, and the last thing he needs is to be here, trapped with some overly curious fox that wants to squish him just to see how his eyes bulge as he squeaks. Will doesn’t have a home, but right now anywhere is better than here.

Captain Lecter tries to start a few more conversations, but Will just sits there, solid as stone, and when the Captain sighs and gets up, Will hops the table, rolls out the window, and takes off.

Margot comes home, as agreed, half an hour before the end of the ball, just enough time for her to change and slide into bed before her father and Cordell come home. She goes to sleep humming and waltzing dreamily, while Will curls up and yawns and dreams of shark smiles and mongooses running circles.

Will goes to M the next morning and together they pick out another lovely cloth, green as the middle of summer and patterned with silver and blue like the spring sky. They talk about horses and dogs, as it turns out M has always wanted a dog but has never gotten one.

“My brother says I should wait for the perfect dog,” M explains absently, making neat marks on the cloth.

Will blinks. He hasn’t found any dog that isn’t perfect.

“Exactly,” she agrees.

Will sweeps the floor and rearranges the display, including finding and organizing a random pile of guard uniforms buried under some men’s suits. M laughs when she spots it and says that once upon a time she wanted to be part of the royal guard before she fell in with the tailors, and in another few hours, Will walks out with yet another gorgeous dress and mask for the second night of the ball.

This time, Will smuggles out some mini hot dogs, warm and delightful, and this time, Captain Lecter climbs up instead of making Will climb down. Will is determined to ignore him for the entirety of the ball until –

“Did you just *smell* me?” he demands, flinching away from Captain Lecter’s nose.

“Difficult to avoid. The wind is blowing in my direction.”

Will’s pretty sure he’s lying through his teeth, but Will’s also sure that Captain Lecter let him get away yesterday instead of throwing him in prison. So he decides to let it go in favor of not being thrown in the dungeon, because that would be terribly hard to explain and also Margot wouldn’t be able to get home because Will is the one letting her slip in the back window.

“So, mongoose, just who are you here for? I imagine it’s not the princess, or you’d be inside.”

“Maybe the princess isn’t for me.”

“Or maybe you ignored the part of the invitation where it stated very clearly that every man and woman of age was invited.”

Will shrugs and stuffs another hotdog in his mouth. He has no delusions about who or what he is. He’s a serving boy, and he’ll be one until he dies. And even if he did enter the room, how could he even begin to stand a chance against these peacocks trussed up with more jewels and gold Will has ever seen in his life? If anything, he’d likely be mistaken for one of the staff and end up serving drinks instead of dancing.

“Happy endings are for other people,” Will says eventually.

“I suppose,” the captain replies, “that depends on your definition of a ‘happy ending’.”

“The prince and the princess meet and fall in love and kiss, and so on and so on. Don’t tell you’ve never heard that tale.”

“Not precisely so neatly summarized, no.”

Will chucks a chunk of bread at him, and ends up more annoyed than he knew he could be when Captain Lecter gracefully dodges it without appearing to move more than a few centimeters in one direction. In fact, his raised eyebrow appears to be a bigger movement than the way he just leaned so casually out of the way.

“And what makes you happy, mongoose? If not fairy tales.”

Will shrugs. “Dogs. Fishing. The sun.”

The captain smiles faintly, but it isn’t the condescending smile most adults use, like *oh look at the cute little boy*. His is more of a resigned smile, as if he simultaneously understands the simplicity of Will’s enjoyment but wishes he could broaden it.

“Simple and pure. Like you.”

“Captain, I pretend to be a serving boy so I could hide in a tree and spy on people. I think that’s the opposite of both pure and simple.”

“I would have to disagree. It was a simple plan that was effectively carried out and for pure intentions.”

“You know,” Will says after a long moment, giving the captain the side-eye, “I thought you were a soldier, not like . . . a philosopher.”

“I can be both, can’t I?”

“Debatable.”

“Why, do you find our debates tiring or annoying? I can always relocate them to their proper location. After all, I was given strict instructions by his Majesty on how to protect the Princess Alana from any unwanted or unexpected . . . guests.”

“Ha ha. Wait. You wouldn’t – ”

“Maybe I would.”

And once again, it’s Will’s clumsy mouth to the rescue, as his first words are: “I don’t have anything worthwhile to give you.”

The captain sighs. “A bribe, you mean. Friends should not need bribes.”

“I just met you yesterday.”

“Indeed. And I would like to have known your name yesterday, mongoose, when you were so excitedly flinging yourself out my window and scampering across the palace grounds like a puppy with its tail on fire.”

Will weighs the risks of having Captain Lecter be further annoyed at him versus knowing his name and taking out his annoyance later, and truly it is a simple equation. He tosses the captain a quick salute and rumples his shirt to dump the crumbs, and as the captain’s eyes trace his movements, Will takes the opportunity to lean down and swing like a monkey back to the ground. Captain Lecter is undoubtedly stronger, but he’s taller and broader too; he has to be far more careful, and therefore much slower, than Will does, so Will, for the second time, flees from the ball cackling into the night.

For the final night of the ball, Will comes into find that M has already picked out the cloth and gotten started without him. He agrees with her taste – black as night, and patterned with gleaming silver droplets to will Margot sparkle like the stars above – so he doesn’t question it and simply shrugs and starts tidying the front. He’s getting better at remembering how everything is arranged, although it drives him crazy how quickly customers can unravel everything again.

Still, it doesn’t stop him from noticing the way M keeps shooting him strange glances.

“What’s wrong?” Will blurts out finally.

M blinks and quickly looks away, but it's too late; Will has already glimpsed some of her emotions. She is feeling, of all the things, rather *curious*. Like a scientist who has seen a caterpillar climb out of a cocoon a butterfly for the first time, and wonders how the two are one and the same but not, all at once.

"I never asked you," M says finally. "What do *you* hope to get out of all this?"

It's not what she wanted to know, Will already knows that. But M has steel walls as formidable as his, so he just goes along with it. "I hope that Margot finds a way out."

"Margot – Margot Verger?"

"Yes."

M's eyes are full of sympathy as she lays down the thread and laces her fingers. For a moment, it's so reminiscent of Captain Lecter that it makes Will startle, and he almost misses what she says next.

"Yes, I have heard things about her father," is all M says. "But that's not what I asked. I wanted to know what you would get out of this."

"The knowledge that she is happy and free."

M clucks her tongue and busies herself with the needle again. Her voice is casual – far too casual, in fact – when she ventures, "Are you sure you don't want a costume, Will? It wouldn't be hard at all to make one for you. And I know the ball calls for every eligible man or woman. You certainly qualify."

"I'm a servant."

"And what is a king or queen but the servant of the people?"

Defense having failed, Will goes on the attack. "And what about you? Are you attending the ball?"

He already knows the answer. Will has an excellent memory for faces, and most of the guests did not don their masks until right before they entered the palace. He knows M wasn't there either, even if her walls prevent him from guessing her true reason. Although honestly it could be any number of reasonable things, like not wanting to uproot her life to get married or just plain not interested in trying to woo a princess while fighting against all the dozens of others there for the exact same reason.

M makes a complicated face, almost like he just asked her to hand him a knife and then stabbed her with it. "It's . . . a long story," M says. "I don't really go near the palace."

And, well, she's making a dress essentially free for him for three nights in a row, so Will decides she's earned some secrets.

Will doesn't get to go to the ball and eat some free good food and trade arguments with Captain Lecter for the third night of the ball. He's not quite sure whether he's sad or happy about this, but the truth is that he really has bigger things on his mind at the moment.

Namely – the fact that Lord Verger is getting suspicious, and therefore has ordered someone to check in on Margot throughout the night.

So Will does the reasonable thing: he ties a big rope of clothes, gets Margot to climb down the side of the house, and then curls up in a ball and pretends to be a sick, drowsy Margot-ball in her bed, demanding that the lights be reduced because they hurt his eyes and coughing whenever anyone asks him a question or comes close so they won't come closer or expect reasonable answers that aren't Will nodding or shaking his head under the covers.

This works pretty well, up until Will eventually nods off and wakes up to feel a hand under the blankets holding onto his leg.

A hand that, by the way, is not his.

Lord Verger's breath stinks of wine and grease as he speaks into Will's ear, seeming not to notice the fact that Will has significantly shorter hair than Margot. "Well, well, looks like you were just trying to get my attention," he slurs, "playing sick and tired, you naughty girl."

Will swallows hard against the bile that rises in his throat. He always knew that Lord Verger was . . . off, in a way, but he was also never really around Lord Verger for extended periods of time, so now with this unpleasant revelation sinking in, he's even more relieved that Margot is off having fun and making connections at the ball, because no one deserves to get groped in the dark by their drunk father.

Unfortunately or fortunately, Will doesn't get along very far in the awkward debate of how long to play dead, because at that moment, Lord Verger's hand gets far enough up his leg that the question of whether it's Margot or not is pretty easily answered, and two seconds later, a rather furious Lord Verger yanks Will straight out of bed by his ankle, and Will lands on the floor thinking, *Well, this isn't good.*

Lord Verger has Margot and Will chained in the wood shed. It's old and derelict, but it was the old horse stable before the new one was built, so it's got a lot of places to attach chains and it's out of the way enough that no one can hear Will and Margot screaming and crying when Lord Verger orders lashes for Will and bruises for Margot.

"Will," Margot whispers the second they're alone, coughing in between sobs and whimpers, "Will, I'm so sorry, I didn't even think –"

Will can barely process her words over the burning lines of pain in his back, even as the cold sets in from where the guards cut off his shirt, but somehow he finds the strength to force out words. "It's not – It's not your fault."

Their reunion doesn't last long though, because Lord Verger waltzes back in smug and even drunker, announcing that he's sold Margot off to get married to some old rich dude, and

Margot's too smart to beg, but even Will can see the way she attempts to drag her feet when they unchain her from the stall, shove a blindfold on her face, and start dragging her away like a sack of potatoes.

"Are you so proud of your efforts now?" Lord Verger purrs into Will's ear, pinching his cheeks like an overenthusiastic grandparent. "Come on now, Willy, smile for me. It's a happy day! We'll have a lovely marriage soon, and maybe I'll even think about letting you attend. If you live of course."

After that, time passes for Will in a daze. Whenever he falls asleep, they dump freezing water on him, and whenever he starts getting too comfortable, Lord Verger orders another lash or two to keep him awake. He claims that he enjoys the screams.

Will, for his part, takes pleasure in how annoyed Lord Verger gets with each passing session when they fail to get out of Will where Margot got her dress or how she got the ball. It's his one joy.

And then, one cold morning, Will wakes up shivering to a draft when someone opens the door, and when he instinctively curls into a ball to protect his already pretty bruised chest, rattling the chains, it shocks the life out of him when instead he hears Captain Lecter say, "*Will.*"

"I never . . . told you . . . my name," Will mumbles dazedly, because somehow it's the only thing he can think to say as Captain Lecter shrugs out of his warm coat to drape it around Will and then starts working on Will's chains like they're the most offensive thing he's ever seen in his life.

Captain Lecter gathers him close and pets his hair like he's a puppy who went missing and has just been found whining and cold in a hole. "I have my sources," he says mysteriously, guiding Will outside with hands so gentle Will could almost forget the sight of the guards, throats cut out and blood running everywhere from when Captain Lecter must have dispatched them to get to Will.

Outside, Will's gut fills with a burning sense of righteousness, to see Mason Verger kneeling in the dirt with a bloody nose as soldiers bustle about, Cordell wheezing and pleading at his side.

"– can't do this!" Lord Verger is shouting.

The soldier holding a sword to his throat smiles. She's fierce, with a sharp grin and black hair tied in a neat bun, and Will likes her even more when she says, "Captain Lecter, welcome back. What are we doing with this filth?"

"Whatever you like, Lieutenant Katz," the captain says, ignoring the way Lord Verger scrabbles at him in favor of boosting Will into a carriage. "Just make your efforts leave him alive enough to stand trial."

Efforts.

Efforts, Will thinks wildly, and then –

“Margot!” he half-yells, and he must really look in bad shape because the captain nearly breaks his spine with how fast his head whips around at the sound of Will’s raised voice.

“Will, Will,” the captain says, “it’s all right. We know. Soldiers are heading after her right now.”

“No, no, no,” Will says, panicked because he’s seen what the Verger money can buy, and the king’s soldiers might be good, but Verger men fight dirty and he can so easily see it in his mind’s eye, the soldiers trotting up only to be beset with crossbows to the eye and daggers to the heel, turning them into gasping corpses wriggling on the floor. “No, that’s not enough, please – ”

The captain captures one of Will’s hands, and the feel of another’s skin against his is so startling he clicks his mouth shut out of reflex.

“Will,” the captain murmurs, kissing his forehead. “I promise you Margot will be safe. If I have to retrieve her myself, I will.”

“Please,” Will repeats blankly, because it has to be worth it, and he doesn’t know any of these soldiers, but he knows Captain Lecter. If he promises, Will knows, deep in his gut, that he means it and he’ll never break his word.

“As you wish.”

That promise secured, Will takes the blissful opportunity to pass the hell out.

Will wakes up, bandaged and sore but warm and covered in the softest blankets ever, to find M sitting at his side, calming knitting what looks like socks.

“Hi,” Will says, because what else can you say when you’re half naked and covered in bandages?”

“Hello. I’m here to give you the talk.”

“The one about not purposely annoying known sadists?” Will asks dryly, wincing as he tries to stretch and ends up only cringing at the little stings of pain that spark all over his back.

M snorts. “Like you’d listen to me about *that*.” She sets down her knitting and crosses her arms, looking so severe that Will gets antsy just looking at the picture she makes. She doesn’t look anything like the teasing and playful M he’s gotten to know as she picked out clothes and cracked dirty jokes and snuck snacks into Will’s basket.

“No,” M continues. “I’m here to give you the ‘hurt my brother and they’ll never find your body talk’.”

Will blinks.

Rewinds.

Still blinks.

“I don’t have any designs on your brother?” Will tries.

M rolls her eyes so hard that Will’s pretty surprised they don’t fall out of her head. Then again, he’s still kind of dizzy, so maybe it’s just the double vision and the pain that is overdoing the way her eyes are rolling in her head.

“My brother is *obsessed* with you,” M states matter-of-factly, as though she’d been educating him on the color of the sky or the location of the sun. “I’ve never seen him get like this when anyone. I mean, normally he’s pretty good at court talk and socializing, but my god, he’s never been so annoying as he’s been these last few days trying to get your name out of me after you ran away from him.”

A sinking feeling starts to bloom in Will’s gut, and he gets out as far as thinking *And who is your brother?* before the door suddenly opens and Captain Lecter strides in.

“Mischa, please stop antagonizing my guest,” Captain Lecter says.

“He’s more my guest than yours.”

Captain Lecter pointedly removes his sword and leans it against another chair before he strides forward, and his touch is gentle and clinical as he presses his fingers against the bandages on Will’s back. In a normal world, Will might blush and squirm away, but he’s too busy as his pain-drugged mind finally starts to speed up in its tracks, clicking pieces together as easily as climbing steps now that the lights have been turned back on.

“So your name is Captain’s Misbrother,” Will slurs, and he’s not quite sure the two sentences came out right but he trusts them to figure it out.

“I thought I asked you to call me Hannibal,” the captain says, almost chiding but for how fond it is. “And yes, this is my sister, who is named Mischa. I believe you are already acquainted with her. And before you ask – yes. We have retrieved Margot, and she is safe under the protection of Princess Alana. I believe that the marriage is set for next month, after the trial for Mason and Cordell Verger is complete.”

“How find me?” Will mumbles.

Hannibal strokes his hair, and it’s so comforting Will almost wants to crawl into his lap and purr like a cat. Only the pain in his back prevents him.

“I recognized Mischa’s style in your friend’s dress immediately. It intrigued me; my sister announced at the beginning that she would not take any orders for the ball, as she believed that Princess Alana had a right to choose people based on their true character, not the flashy nature of their clothing. I asked her, of course, for your name, but she refused.”

“I am *not* your matchmaker.”

“I merely wished to have a more in-depth conversation.”

“And for you,” Mischa grumbles, twitching her knitting needles as though she wishes to stab her brother with, “that *is* flirting.”

Now that Will has the dots laid out for him, he can see the ghost of Hannibal in Mischa and vice versa. Hannibal’s clothes are perfectly laid out and color-aligned, and while it does fit in with Hannibal’s fussy nature, he can see the subtle signs of Mischa’s tailoring style and careful hand. Meanwhile, Mischa’s gestures hover between total court politeness and the gentle slouches of someone who doesn’t visit court often, which makes sense if Hannibal and his soldier-straight spine rubs off on her.

They are their own people, unquestionably so. Will attributes this to something that happened, because he can tell they are very close due to how easily they fall into the pattern of banter again, but something dark and long-age drove them apart, which, Will supposes is why the store is called “Mischa’s” and not “Mischa Lecter’s”.

“ – Will? Will, are you feeling quite alright?”

Hannibal is shaking him. Will realizes he might have drifted off, but a yawn takes over before words can.

“Oh, quite fussing, Hannibal,” Mischa sighs. “He’s just tired, he’s not going to die on you. Your medical skills are unmatched. Now go to sleep before he gets tempted to stab your himself over your mother-henning.”

Will falls asleep to the comforting back-and-forth rhythm of Hannibal and Mischa getting to know each other again, and he falls asleep with a satisfied smile on his face.

Eventually, Will learns the full story. Apparently when Margot had turned up for the third and final night of the ball but Will hadn’t, Hannibal had taken it upon himself to pop up behind her and interrogate her for Will’s location. Margot had escaped, but, rather understandably, being rather shaken, she hadn’t taken proper precautions and had walked right into her father’s trap. When Margot failed to accept Alana’s invitation for further courting, Alana and Hannibal had joined forces to come investigating, and apparently just as Hannibal was slicing down guards in Lord Verger’s house to reach Will, Alana had been cheerfully stabbing and disemboweling guards to reach Margot in her captor’s house. She’d proposed on the spot, as “every time you leave, I never had any guarantee you would return, so please” and Margot had hugged her right then and there.

They hold the trial for Mason and Cordell as soon as Will can sit in a formal chair without wincing at the feel of the hard back against his back, and Will finds himself flanked with Margot on his right and Hannibal on his left, Hannibal with hard eyes and one hand on his sword, whilst the Princess Alana and her parents sit next to Margot.

Mason and Cordell are quickly and easily stripped of their titles and pressed into service as servants themselves, working in the fields to pay off the many, many, many debts they owe. It

does make Will smile to himself, even if Hannibal doesn't seem quite as settled by the justice doled out.

It's okay, though. It's not perfect, but this is Will's life, not a fairytale.

He is well enough to dance at Margot's wedding, although it doesn't really matter because Hannibal swans in to claim all of his dances immediately, and Hannibal is so gifted a dancer that he can make even Will's untrained and unsteady butt look graceful.

"You're going to look ridiculous," Will tries to warn him as Hannibal pulls on his hand.

"I am confident in your abilities."

"Yeah, well, I'm not!"

"Then I shall lead."

"Hannibal – "

"Trust me, Will," Hannibal says quietly, and well. It's gotten Will this far, and it's not like he has anything to lose, really. Hannibal is so obviously interested in him that Will knows exactly whenever he enters a room by the way Will's empathy starts going off about the eyes focused on the way he walks or sits or stands or reads or eats or does anything, really.

Besides, it gives Will a perfect opportunity to rest his head on Hannibal's shoulder and whisper, "I know what you did to Mason Verger."

Hannibal doesn't even falter in his steps. He does, however, cock his head ever so slightly, just enough to press his chin against Will's curls, and his hand presses lightly against the still sometimes painful scars of Verger's punishments. "And what makes you think I did anything to Mason Verger, my dear?"

Will hums. "I heard he somehow managed to cut off part of his nose and his cheeks and was laughing as he did so."

"How macabre."

"You turned him inside out," Will continues softly. "You made his outside match his inside."

"Such an interesting idea, my dear."

Will hides his smile in Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal is putting on a rather good show, but Will can feel the way he swallows compulsively as Will speaks and he knows without looking that Hannibal's eyes have turned hungry and dark, the same way they did during the trial when Will voted unflinchingly for Mason and Cordell to suffer death instead of indentured servanthood. He'd been overruled by Princess Alana, but he still hadn't missed the warm approval in Hannibal's eyes as they all left.

"If you'd had more time," Will says, "I imagine you would have made him beautiful."

“For you, my dear,” Hannibal replies, twirling him in his arms before reeling him back, as steadily and hungrily as a fisherman does a fish, “theoretically of course, if I had had the time, I would have made him the most beautiful work of art in your honor.”

And this – this right here, *this* is why Will doesn’t believe in fairy godmothers. Why should he?

He has a lover wrapped up in a wolf-skin inside of a killer, and that’s all he needs.

“I thought you didn’t believe in happy endings.”

Instead of responding, Will takes the opportunity to kiss the teasing smirk off of Hannibal’s face, and it’s his first kiss but given how dazed Hannibal looks when he finally pulls back, Will’s pretty sure that he got it mostly right.

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 4's prompt is "Sleeping Beauty". For a second I was gonna make Hannibal and Will dragons again, but then my muse had a new idea. Oops.

Sleeping Beauty

Chapter Summary

It's not like Will *chose* to slay the dragon, okay?

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Will being a creeper and getting stalkerish and obsessed with someone who is unaware and can't consent, but I promise it's nowhere near as traumatic or drastic as the real Sleeping Beauty fairytale

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's not like Will *chose* to slay the dragon, okay?

Dragons are fairly rare and usually they don't bother humans or any other creatures. Well, they hunt for food, of course, but they generally keep to themselves in distant mountain ranges or remote islands, so Will's heard about dragons but never actually seen one. This one, though, is pretty rude for a dragon, because Will's barely had time to say "Hello, sorry, just passing through to the other side of the bridge for a fishing trip with my dogs" before the dragon opens its mouth and tries to bathe him in fire.

And normally Will would just brush this off, but this fishing trip is one that Will's put off for *ages* burning the midnight oil to help Jack, so he's more annoyed than usual at yet another delay in his trip and, rather reasonably in his opinion, takes out that anger on the rude dragon.

Then he moves on with his fishing trip, although he does gather up a few scattered fallen scales because, hey, dragon scales are pretty rare and versatile and it's not like this dead dragon is going to need them anymore.

Then, of course, once Will has crossed the bridge, he realizes exactly what the dragon was trying to guard.

"Of course it's a bloody golden castle," Will groans.

Even more telling, it's an abandoned golden castle that has ivy that must be hundreds of years old climbing all over the walls. The castle is pristine, though, save for the gathered dust in chambers the dragon didn't frequent, and other chambers are filled to the brim with the growing hoard of jewels and gold that makes up the dragon's hoard.

One tower, though, is completely untouched, and Will climbs it mostly because he's starting to see spots from all the light reflecting from all the gold and also he doesn't want his dogs to start trying to eat any of the shiny things.

And there, at the top of the tower, he discovers the real reason the castle – which obviously at one point housed some damn wealthy people – is abandoned and caused a dragon to take up residence.

There's a man, garbed in royal clothes and with a beautiful golden crown atop his head, lying caught in a Sleeping Curse at the top of the tower. And this man is *beautiful*, so beautiful Will can barely take his eyes off him, with a doctor's hands and a dancer's legs and the sharpest cheekbones known to man and just the slightest, tiniest smirk on his face, as though he'd known exactly what was going to happen when whoever cast the spell cursed him into unending sleep.

It's true that when the witches and fairies start casting bad curses, people – even royal people – are quick to flee.

Will doesn't think he could have left this prince though.

In fact, he doesn't even notice that the sun has set until his dogs start getting impatient and nosing at his legs, whining and barking for food, and he only leaves with many, many glances backwards over his shoulder, as if to ensure himself that the prince isn't something his imagination dreamed up.

When he comes back the next day, though, he is almost completely convinced it was a dream – until he ascends the final step and sees the prince, still lying there, still smirking, still beautiful in the sunlight.

After that, Will comes back every single day.

It gets even better when he starts going through the prince's belongings and finds a journal with what he seems is the prince's handwriting, and it's just as beautiful as the prince himself. And if Will wasn't already in love with the prince's appearance, he definitely falls hard and fast for the prince's mind, captured so brilliantly and eloquently in thoughts and discussions contained in the journal.

And then he gets to the last page, where the writing starts to grow shaky and meander over the lines, and Will almost frowns at the unusual mess before he registers that he's reading the prince calmly attempt to document his descent into the sleeping curse after he touched a favorite knife.

The blood, the prince writes shakily, it looks black in the moonlight. It is so beautiful, as this knife. Perhaps I should have not touched it. But one day I will

The words stop there, and it must be when he finally succumbed.

Will looks at the prince, then at the journal, and then back at the prince. Jack had laughed, the one time he confided that he was having dreams of blood looking black in the moonlight.

He'd been ridiculed, in fact, because of course blood is red and everyone knows that and how dare he think anything different.

And yet this stranger – so removed from Will's knowledge and existence and age – seems to have thought the exact same thing.

Given all that, perhaps it's not so remarkable that Will decides only a day later to attempt to break the curse himself. It's considered common knowledge that the antidote to most powerful curses is true love's kiss, and, well, if Will isn't in love, he's not sure what he is. Obsessed, maybe, but what kind of love cannot turn into obsession and what kind of obsession cannot turn into love?

The second their lips meet, the prince's eyes flick open.

The prince, once having gotten over the shock of coming awake for the first time in however many years, introduces himself as Prince Hannibal Lecter. Will, who's never heard of the Lecter royal family and doesn't recognize the strange crest Hannibal presents him with, just kind of shrugs and goes with it. Mostly he does this because Hannibal keeps giving him the strangest sort of look, as though he's some kind of miracle given human form, and Hannibal thinks he might vanish the second Hannibal isn't touching or smelling or kissing or touching him.

“What?” Will finally snaps, when Hannibal's hovering finally gets to him. “I can cook!”

“I know you can,” Hannibal says instantly, withdrawing to the edge of the table with such a dejected expression that it makes Will's heart throb. “My apologies, I – we need some more wood, I'll just – ”

“Hannibal. *Hannibal*.”

Once Hannibal stops trying to escape, Will asks, “Seriously. What's bothering you?”

“Sometimes I think you are a dream conjured by my imagination,” Hannibal says, after a long moment, words coming so slowly it's like they are teeth being torn out by the roots. “A dream made flesh to torment me in my sleep, and that when I finally awaken I will never find you again.”

Will strokes along Hannibal's shoulders, so tense and strained even though all Hannibal's done today is walk around the castle and give Will a tour. “I am real, I promise. I'm real and I'm here and I won't leave you.”

“Every day with you is a miracle. I cherish it.”

“Well, that explains why you always go to sleep after me and wake up before me, but like – Hannibal. You're not being sustained by magic anymore. You need sleep.”

“I think I've slept enough for a million lifetimes. I could never get enough of you.”

“Flatterer,” Will teases.

“No, merely a man who is well aware of the gift I have been granted,” Hannibal replies, smooth as always, although, hey, the kissing initiated by Hannibal is new but also pretty nice and Will doesn’t object at all. And hey, they’ve got the rest of their lives for Will to convince Hannibal that he’ll never leave. He doesn’t find that prospect half as daunting as going back to Jack.

“Stay with me,” Hannibal says.

Will raises his eyebrow. They’re in his house, which Will built with his bare hands, surrounded by his dogs and surviving off of Will’s supplies. “Where would I go, Hannibal?”

“Anywhere. Everywhere. Please stay.”

“For you,” Will promises, “I would do anything.”

Hannibal is a prince. He was raised to never lie, and he never will lie to Will.

However.

Never lying to Will is not quite the same as telling Will everything, and there are some things that Will never asks about, so Hannibal never tells him.

Like, for example, how Hannibal’s actually only been under the killing curse for three years, not the hundreds he knows Will suspects. Like, for example, how Hannibal had actually been caught by the curse because he had stabbed a witch with his favorite knife only to realize too late she had embedded the powerful curse in it. Like, for example, how Hannibal is actually the Ripper, the most famous serial killer in recent memory that Will has reams and reams of material on as he studies the pattern in case the Ripper ever returns from his unexpected and sudden hiatus.

Will is the most glorious thing Hannibal’s ever had the fortune to sink his claws in, and he’ll never let him go. Although sometimes, just sometimes, he’ll see the way Will looks at him, in the low glow moonlight when Will thinks he isn’t aware, and he thinks, *Maybe Will does know*.

In the end, it doesn’t matter.

Hannibal will never leave Will as long as he lives. And Will, by his own admission, will never leave Hannibal for as long as he lives. And that’s enough for Hannibal.

FINIS

Day 5's prompt is "The Little Mermaid". Not quite sure what I'm gonna write yet, but it might involve a human Will wanting to become a merman.

The Little Mermaid

Chapter Summary

Will is eleven the first time he sees the merman.

Chapter Notes

Warnings for this chapter: Hannibal goes hunting and murder happens. That's about it.

As I promised, this collection is NOT abandoned. Just . . . you know. It has a turtle-slow, procrastinating author behind it. Here's the new ficlet!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In the beginning of time, Will's people came from deep within the earth. They awoke to the sound of waves on the shore and the sight of stars in the sky, but what stirred their hearts most were the whistles of the wind through the trees and the taste of freshly picked fruit and the never-ending stretch of green as far as the eye could see. They are children of the land, for the land bore them and the land sustains them and upon death it is to the land they return.

They are not alone, of course.

They share their world with the children of the sea, born of the waves and the foam and bubbles, and the children of the air, born of clouds and winds and sunbeams. For the longest time, Will had only ever heard of the merpeople and the angels in legends and stories.

Then, of course, come the wars.

Will is only six when the merpeople claw their way up from the depths, bringing creatures that nightmares are made of: maws big enough to swallow entire villages, tails that can down a dozen boats with one careless swipe, and poison strong enough to forever taint supplies of fresh water. And that doesn't even take into account the merpeople themselves, who can outswim any human and adore seizing helpless children from the shore and dragging them down the depths to drown. For that is how you kill a child of the earth, after all – you smother them in water and air.

The wars are terrible. Each race strikes a blow against the other that is returned twofold, until no one can even begin to recall how the wars began. Thousands perish, and the seas and the skies and the earth groan with the weight of children who will never laugh again.

In the end, the wars do not stop so much as pause. Everyone has lost too much to fight anymore, and so the merpeople slink back down to the depths and the angels ascend to the skies and the humans withdraw deep into the forests. Officially, it is a truce, but in reality, it is more of a waiting game of bated breath and weary eyes, and everyone watches to see who blinks first.

It is a long waiting game.

Will is eleven the first time he sees the merman. It's entirely by accident; he gets in a fight with his father and runs to the coast to sulk, since he knows it'll be the last place they'll think to look for him when they eventually notice he's missing.

At first, he thinks the merman is just a weird rock formation, but given that it's really dark outside and the merman isn't moving, he thinks that can be forgiven.

He doesn't really start panicking until the human shaped rock looks at him with glowing eyes.

Will flails backwards and falls on his butt on the sand. When he manages to get his breathing under control and stand up, the coast is clear – of anything, including moving human-shaped rock-mimicking merman. The indication that Will was not alone is the slowing growing pool of ripples in the calm sea.

The next time, Will is fourteen.

He is harvesting seaweed and kelp from the jetties, a basket slung around his waist and pants rolled up his legs, and he is humming a little song under his breath to pass the time. Most of the people in his village hate the task, but Will loves it, since it gives him an excuse to get away and not having people staring at him all the time. Even better, no one mocks him for it, because the seaweed and kelp are very valuable for a variety of reasons, including bandaging wounds, fertilizing the crops, and, in a pinch, serving as a quick meal. Every time Will can get the task, he volunteers.

He doesn't realize that he has company until a spray of droplets soaks his face, and as he brushes his hair out of his face, he catches sight of a red *something* slinking out of view out of the corner of his eye.

Will goes very, very still. Children are always taught the warning signs of a merman or angel attack, and one of the most important rules is to trust one's gut; if one thinks one has seen something out of the corner of their eye, they probably have seen something. He's under no illusions that he can fight off a merman on his own, but he'll be damned if he goes down easy.

When the next wave comes rushing in, Will uses the boost in water to pull himself onto the rocks completely. It's not perfect, since he's still surrounded by water, but he has the advantage of higher ground and a route back to land.

“I know you’re there!” he shouts. “Show yourself!”

Mocking silence is his only response. Will holds his breath and listens to the silence. It’s a tense silence, the kind you can only get when multiple people are holding their breath.

“I won’t be dinner for you! Take me and there will be a hunting party underway by night. You really want to die tomorrow?”

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a flick of the red again, but it’s much farther out now. It’s within swimming distance, certainly, but it’s far away enough that Will could easily run back to land before it reached him, given the treacherous position of the jetties around them.

Will takes the opportunity and runs. He’s not stupid enough to believe that the retreat was anything but planned.

Will is fifteen and very, very, very drunk the third time he sees the merman.

He’s so drunk, actually, that when the head with the long flowing hair and strange red eyes emerges from the water, Will just bobs his head in greeting and continues humming to himself, too out of it to care that he’s singing very off-key to an audience consisting of the night sky and a human-eating merman.

Eventually, he stops singing. He’s not sure when, but he must have at some point because he is not singing when the merman speaks to him for the first time.

“If that is how you sing, no wonder you must scabble in the shallows for food to make a living.”

Will takes another swig of the bottle he swiped from his father’s not-so-secret stash. “That’s because we don’t sing to lure in our prey, you dunce. Only merpeople do that. We scavenge and forage. That’s our way.”

“Only sirens sing to lure in prey,” the merman counters. “The rest of us sing to express ourselves and our magic.”

“Well, good for you, but I am very much a normal human.”

The merman snorts. “Does that mean all of you humans smell so terrible?”

Will lolls his head to the side. Distantly, he thinks that he should be alarmed to find glowing red merman eyes about six inches from his face, bobbing in time with the waves, but Will’s pretty damn drunk so he just considers it and then lets the thought float away. Drunk Will has more important things to be alarmed about.

“Did you just smell me?”

“Difficult to avoid,” the merman says, wrinkling his nose theatrically. He actually doesn’t look that different from a human, for all that Will has heard tales of the monsters of the deep. His eyes are strange and no human would wear their hair that long, of course, but he has two

eyes and one nose and one mouth and two ears like everyone else. “You reek of acidity and bitterness.”

Will giggle-snorts. He can’t help himself. “Yeah, bitter and acidic, that’s me.”

“You are not poisoned? You did this to yourself deliberately?”

“What, you never heard of alcohol before?” Will waves the bottle for emphasis, except that he’s drank so much that it’s empty and the suddenly feather-light bottle slips through his fingers, landing with a plop in the water. “Ah damn. I wanted more of that.”

With a flick of a blood-red tail, the merman seizes the bottle and lifts it up for inspection. His face goes through the funniest series of expressions Will has ever seen when he finally puts it to his face and sniffs: shock, outrage, disgust, and resignation. The merman sets the bottle down on the rock near Will with a dismissive sniff, as though the contents within were so offensive that he couldn’t allow it to sully his precious ocean.

“What a terrible scent,” the merman says. “You humans already smell terrible, but that – that is a stench so great even the hungriest kraken would avoid you.”

“Sounds good to me,” Will yawns. “I’ll take no krakens, thanks.”

Will remembers very little after that. He’s pretty sure that the merman kept talking, and he knows that he made some kind of sounds in return, but words? Will’s pretty sure he was far beyond words at that point. Either way, Will wakes up to a hangover and no merman, but most interestingly of all, no teeth and claws sunk into his torso to drag him down to the depths for a good chomping.

Apparently, Will reflects, the merman spoke the truth: alcohol did make him smell bad enough to become unappetizing.

Will is seventeen and very much not drunk the next time he sees the merman.

He’s also pretty angry, but it’s more of the being sober part that leads him to kick the merman in the face when he comes up. The merman reels backwards with an affronted grunt and a mighty slap of his tail. This is unfortunate for Will, since he draws his blade and finds himself facing an enormous wave instead of a taken off guard merman, and by the time Will is done spluttering, his knife is long since lost.

Will leaps for the nearest rock, but he hears another *whoosh* and another wave knocks him into the ocean.

And then the merman is *right there*, one strong arm around Will’s waist and tight fingers squeezing Will’s throat. Will scrabbles helplessly, but he’s been taught to fight humans, not merman; when he kicks at the merman’s tail, the scales leave scuff marks in his boots, and when he yanks at the merman’s fingers, the merman merely laughs.

“Hello again, little one,” the merman purrs in his ears.

“Let me go!”

“So you can kick me again? I think not.”

Will wheezes and thrusts his elbow back. The merman makes a soft sound, but it’s more amusement than pain and he certainly doesn’t release Will.

“Vicious little thing, aren’t you?”

“I have no plans on being dinner,” Will snaps. “Now let me go!”

“I don’t plan to eat *you*. You’re naught but skin and bones. You do, however, make for very appetizing bait.”

Will’s confused reply is lost in the rush of air. The merman whirls, his strong tail flinging them about in a complete circle so abruptly that Will feels sick to his stomach, and shoves Will away. The force of the push slams him against the rocks, but he’s so not so dazed that he doesn’t see the glorious sight of the merman rising in a whirl of water, one arm drawn back to throw a mighty spear of ice that crystallizes in his hand. The merman heaves it forward with a shout, and there’s an enraged, gurgling screech.

Will whips about just in time to see an angel fall from the sky. It tries to flap its wings to save itself, but the merman’s spear has pierced right through its chest and into the wings, so it merely smacks in the water with a terrible *thump* and goes still.

“Dinner is served,” the merman says, in a tone of great satisfaction.

By the time Will clambers onto the rocks, suffused with fury at being played as bait for a merman to trap an angel, however, the only indication that anything happened is a small pool of blood on the surface.

Will is one-and-twenty when he finally manages to have a civil conversation with the merman.

Will’s grown used to his stalker, because the merman seems to find him more amusing than appetizing. For all the bloodthirsty stories Will has heard, the merman rarely gets within touching distance, much less biting distance. He doesn’t sing spells to make Will drown himself. He doesn’t send waves to crack Will’s head open against the rocks. He most certainly doesn’t leap out of the depths and rip into Will’s neck with teeth and claws.

“You’re late,” Will remarks to open air, bending to scrabble at a particularly recalcitrant mussel. “Normally you start your stalking the second I go further than knee-deep in your precious territory.”

The merman laughs. For all that his top half looks human, he doesn’t talk or even laugh like one. His laughs are always edged with the sounds of waves, like he is laughing underwater. “Perhaps I am not late at all, and you are merely unobservant.”

“If that was the case, you would have definitely scolded me about it,” Will points out cheerfully, because the merman never loses a chance to rib Will for his terrible hunting skills.

“So it does have some brains.”

“Shut up.”

“Will Graham, if you truly wanted me to go away, you would have brought your hunters,” the merman says.

Will is still not quite sure how or when the merman learned his name, but he takes great pride in using it. Will mostly just ignores him, because he’s asked the merman countless times and never gotten a reply.

“Maybe I have, and you’re falling into their trap.”

The merman doesn’t even bother to reply. Then again, it is a fairly terrible reply. Will is waist-deep in water and the merman is powerful enough to overcome any trap in water so deep and far away from shore. A projectile weapon would be the only thing that could come close, except that the rocks surrounding them making for perfect covers and with one swish of his tail the merman could be far away and out of range in seconds.

“So,” Will says, “what are you going to lecture me on today?”

He’s learned that the merman likes to talk. He’s no siren, but the merman still likes the sound of his own voice. Over the years Will has learned about everything from angel attack formations to how to arrange cutlery underwater. In the beginning, it was because the merman would just follow Will around talking constantly; now, Will often delays his return home to listen.

“Nothing at all,” the merman replies, “if you continue to refer to it as lectures.”

“You’re talking to me without interruption for hours at a time to deliver information. It’s definitely lecturing.”

“With you, Will. I am talking with you.”

“Whatever you say,” Will says. Then he frowns, because he realizes the merman is moving . . . differently. A lot slower, for one thing, and he’s not being nearly as flamboyant with his maneuvers about the rocks. If he had to make comparisons, Will would say that the merman moves like injured prey trying to pretend it is not injured. “What, do I smell bad again? Why are you so far away from me? I’m not armed.”

“You’re a human. Your kind is never unarmed.”

“You could literally drown me in – are you *bleeding*?”

“It’s nothing,” the merman demurs, like Will can’t see the inky black liquid pooling at his waist. He’s never seen the merman bleed before, but given that the merman glares when Will pokes at it, he thinks it’s safe to say that it is not a good sign.

The merman's torso is warm when Will presses his hands against it. The pressure makes the merman wince, which is the only reason Will catches a glimpse of the weeping wound in his side. The edges are jagged and rough, like the merman had yanked the offending weapon from his skin without thinking about it.

"I thought your kind healed fast."

The merman blinks coolly at him. "This is fast."

"You're bleeding."

"And an hour ago I was nearly severed at the waist. This is an improvement, believe me."

"A human weapon?"

"Yes."

"Sorry," Will says helplessly. He's seen the weapons his village deploys to hunt merpeople, and they're all incredibly nasty. Most times, the only thing his people can do for those caught in the traps is to give them the mercy of a quick death.

The merman hums. "I do not hold you responsible for the crimes of your entire race, Will. Besides, it was my fault for getting too close."

That catches Will's attention. The merman never apologizes or admits fault like that. "Too close?"

"One of your . . . friends saw us talking. I lingered after you left and paid the price."

Will reels back in horror. He had thought that some in the village were paying unusually close attention to him when he left to gather food, but Will has always been considered strange, so he just brushed it off. He never considered that someone might follow him to the waters and watch as he shared a conversation with one of their greatest enemies.

Will has seen what happens when a villager defects. The man had taken five hours to die, and that was just amongst human enemies.

"They're going to kill me," Will says numbly.

The merman looks at him, and his eyes have never been so open before. Normally Will can't make head or tails of what the merman is thinking, but right now, the only reason Will can't read him is because he's flickering through too many emotions too quickly. Hope, wariness, resolution, appreciation, hunger, defeat – all of it, and in less than a second.

"Will, look at me," says the merman. He holds out a hand. "Do you trust me?"

And Will doesn't even know his name – but he knows the merman, all the same. He knows he prefers fish to squid, that he enjoys hunting krakens and angels, that he finds Will's fishing habits laughably inadequate, that he bleeds black blood and can smash stone with one hand. He knows that the merman risked death to find Will again and offer him a way out.

Will takes his hand.

Will wakes up underwater with bubbles steaming from his mouth and a giant tail where his legs should be.

The upside of being underwater in a secret cave? No one can hear you scream. The downside? When Will flails off the bed, instead of falling onto the soft algae bed, his frantic tail swishes send him up and he bangs his head on the ceiling instead, so by the time the merman gets back to him, looking partly amused and partly alarmed, Will is back on the bed and clutching at his head.

“So let me get this straight,” Will says, glaring through his fingers, “your solution to me being hunted down by my village as a traitor for talking to a merman was to turn me into one?”

The merman crosses his arms. It’s almost petulant, and Will would find it amusing if he wasn’t still trying to find out how to use his tail. “You are no longer welcome in the world of humans. But my kind won’t care where you came from, and we do not have any desire to start a new war. You would be welcome here among us.”

“Yeah, if I don’t die from braining myself on the ceiling.”

“You are so pessimistic. I can teach you.”

“I don’t even know your name.”

“My name is Hannibal,” the merman says. “I am a citizen of Atlantis. And if you are willing to learn and adapt, you can become one of us.”

Will sighs. He leans against the wall and looks at his tail again. It’s green, like the trees Will grew up among and the kelp he harvested for food, and the scales glimmer dimly in the light. It feels alien to his touch, for all that he can feel each finger he lays against it. But still: “Everything comes with a price. What’s the price for this?”

“Nothing. I have already paid that price.”

“Hannibal.”

“The feather of an angel,” Hannibal reveals, backing away as Will swims closer, winding through the water. “The scale of a merman. The hair of a human. And one kiss.”

Will pauses. “What, did you kiss me when I was unconscious?”

“No.”

“So then the price isn’t paid,” Will surmises. “And what did you bargain as collateral, Hannibal?”

Hannibal lifts his chin. He looks really unrepentant for someone who has just upended Will's entire life on a whim, when merely swimming Will to a new village far away from his old one would have sufficed. "My tail. I have three days to convince you."

Will inches forward, and he's distinctly amused when Hannibal bumps against the wall and starts, like he's lost track of his surroundings. Being aware of what was around him was Hannibal's first lecture to him. Will reaches out and coils against Hannibal's torso, and now instead of being blazing hot, Hannibal merely feels warm. Perhaps a tail isn't the only new thing Will has gained.

"Three days," Will repeats. "Well, that witch is going to be very disappointed."

"And why is that?"

"You've had years to court me. I fell in love with you a long time ago," Will says, and then he's kissing Hannibal and it's even better than he ever dreamed, in those dark hours at night when he would curl into his bed and dream dark things in his sleep. Hannibal comes alive under his kiss, winding their tails together and biting at his lip, and Will laughs as they twirl in the water, trading bites and kisses until Will grows tired and merely lays his head upon Hannibal's shoulder.

He'll miss his village, to be sure. He'll miss the dogs and the festivals and the simple life of harvesting food in the water while Hannibal chatters at his back.

But Will has never been one to look away from new opportunities. Hannibal is offering him a new life, literally, and he'll take it with open arms. He can't wait to swim in the open ocean and enter Atlantis and hunt an angel at Hannibal's side.

"Welcome to the ocean, my beloved," Hannibal whispers. He tilts his head to the side, and Will sees a modest table laid for two. The plates are stained red with blood and the tablecloth is lined with feathers too large for any bird, and Will's nose itches when he registers the strange scent wafting towards them. "Dinner is served."

FINIS

Chapter End Notes

Day 6 is "Beauty and the Beast". I have two vastly different ideas, and we'll see which wins: one involves teacups and the second involves wendigos. So yeah. See ya then!

End Notes

Come say hi on [tumblr](#)! I promise I won't bite. Messages, comments, or kudos will make me smile though. And write faster. The little things in life, you know. :D

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!